



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
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February 23, 2004

The Honorable Alex Deccio, Chair  
Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee  
201 John A. Cherberg Building  
Post Office Box 40466  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0466

Dear Senator Deccio:

We are writing as members of the Washington State Board of Health in support of Substitute House Bill 2711, relating to funding a central resource center for the nursing work force, which is scheduled to be heard before your committee February 25.

Our support for the bill relates to the Board's interest in expanding the diversity of our health workforce as a means to address disparities in health status among Washington's increasingly diverse communities. The State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State;
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state – underserved, minority and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods.

Because of these findings, the Board supports the nursing central resource center's goal of facilitating partnerships to promote diversity within the profession. The Board also supports the provisions that would require the central nursing resource center to collect race and ethnicity data and to evaluate whether nursing education and articulation programs effectively increase access, especially for populations that are underrepresented in the nursing profession.

Collection of race and ethnicity health workforce data is one of the Board's recommendations—it is vital to understanding the composition of Washington's health workforce and to evaluating

the effectiveness of efforts to increase diversity. Several other groups addressing health workforce issues have highlighted the need for race and ethnicity data:

- One of the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force goals is to increase health workforce diversity, and outcome measures listed in the Task Force's report rely on the collection of race and ethnicity data (<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/HCTFRP02.PDF>).
- The Health Workforce Diversity Network's enumeration committee has recommended collecting race and ethnicity data following OFM's guidelines, available at <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/index.htm#race>.

An emphasis on access to nursing education and career mobility for underrepresented populations is also important to achieve the goals of the Board, the Task Force, and the Health Workforce Diversity Network. Hispanics are especially underrepresented in nursing—in 1999 Hispanics made up 7.5 percent of Washington's population, but only 4.2 percent of two-year RN programs ([http://www.sboh.wa.gov/Priorities/disparities/2001\\_HD\\_Report.pdf](http://www.sboh.wa.gov/Priorities/disparities/2001_HD_Report.pdf)). In the Pacific Census regions, which includes Washington, Hispanics/Latinos made up 22.8 percent of the population, but only 3.5 percent of RNs, and Black/African Americans made up 5.8 percent of the population, but only 3.1 percent of RNs (<ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/bhpr/workforceprofiles/WA.pdf>).

As highlighted in the Board's health disparities work, efforts that result in increased health workforce diversity are likely to reduce health disparities through improved health care access, health care quality, and health outcomes.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A.  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health



Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.  
Member, Washington State Board of Health

cc: Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee Members  
House Health Care Committee Members  
Representative Kenney, Chair, House Higher Education Committee  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Madeleine Thompson, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board and  
Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force  
Judy Huntington, Washington State Nurses Association and Health Workforce Diversity  
Network  
Steve Meyer, Department of Health